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Queering as Europeanisation, Europeanisation as Queering: Challenging Homophobia in Everyday Life in Montenegro

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Reinforcing a symbolic bind between acceptance of homosexuality and European belonging, or making “homosexuality” appear inseparable from “Europe”, is potentially problematic: it positions non-heterosexual practices and people as not quite legitimate parts of the Montenegrin polity. We argue that the real challenge for improving the position of Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people is to destabilise this conceptual link and to make homosexuality a legitimately Montenegrin political issue. As long as public officials and state institutions engage with LGBT concerns because the EU requests it of them and because it is presumably a European “thing to do”—rather than because of people who live in Montenegro and experience various forms of oppression on the basis of their sexuality and gender—non-heterosexual sexual practices will not be perceived as constitutive of the political and social life of Montenegro.

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In order to make this point, we first discuss a sense of separation from LGBT activism which various LGBT people expressed during a number of informal conversations and semi-structured interviews we conducted in Podgorica, the capital of Montenegro, over the last 3 years. After that, we offer an account of LGBT activism in the country, explaining its “upside-down” roots. We want to emphasise that our story is told from the perspective of some of its main actors and that other actors of the same story—the state officials, EU representatives, and other activists—may tell it in a different way. Yet, we contend that in whatever way the story is told, it will illuminate the intersections of LGBT activism with the process of “Europeanisation” as it has been enacted during the EU accession negotiations. Finally, we briefly discuss possible directions of LGBT activism which could challenge the conceptual link between “Europe” and “homosexuality”.

Accommodating Homophobia and a Sense of Separation from LGBT Activism

Petar and Goran (pseudonyms) are a gay couple in their early thirties, living in Podgorica. Goran works at a local store, while Petar undertakes various poorly paid tasks that leave him enough time to dedicate himself to his cartoon drawing. Their relationship seems to be very loving, tender, and monogamous. They are open about their relationship only towards their closest friends, mostly heterosexual women, with whom they regularly watch movies, take day trips across Montenegro, and discuss everyday trivia.

Just like many other gay men in Montenegro, they express aversion towards the local “scene”, claiming it is a “meat market” where any meaningful human relationship is destroyed before it could even take place, in favour of short and possibly passionate but often impersonal sexual encounters. Taking into account the fact that Podgorica has approximately 180,000 residents and that heteronormativity is pervasive, it should not come as a surprise that there are no LGBT clubs, cafes, cinemas, or town quarters. The “gay scene” in Montenegrin towns usually revolves around and within online spaces, a few public parks, one well-known public beach, and infrequent LGBT parties organised by the local NGOs. LGBT people also gather at the Counselling Centre opened by

the NGO *Juventas* in 2011 and in the LGBT Social Centre opened by the LGBT Forum Progress in 2013. In Petar and Goran's account, people from the "scene" do not welcome any glimpse of vulnerability or emotion, because it is "all focused on one thing—sex". Petar and Goran claim this is why they deleted their Gay Romeo accounts once they were sure their relationship was "the real deal". They do not attend the LGBT parties and they do not usually hang out with other LGBT people. Instead, they spend a lot of time alone at Goran's rented apartment or with Petar's family, at their place on the outskirts of the town.

Within his family, Petar is in a "transparent closet", an experience which impedes his full expression of his sexual identity (Kuhar, 2007; Švab & Kuhar, 2014). Several years back, Petar's parents discovered their son's online gay chat profile, which led to a fight lasting several days. Afterwards, the issues of marriage, love, and homosexuality were rarely mentioned. When Petar started bringing Goran home in the first few months of their relationship, his parents did not oppose it, but neither did they acknowledge its nature. Although all involved were probably aware that this was an intimate emotional and sexual relationship, it was renamed as a friendship within Petar's family. As time passed, Goran became something between a friend and a family member for Petar's parents. He is at their place on a daily basis, he cooks with Petar's mother, he helps Petar's father with house repairs, they talk on the phone with certain regularity, and Goran and Petar often sleep in the same room at their house. Petar's mother sometimes even calls Goran "my" or "mine", thus clearly conveying closeness and tenderness. However, the fact that Petar and Goran are in a loving relationship that involves sex is almost never mentioned openly.

Petar and Goran did not speak about the Pride Processions and LGBT activism as something that concerned them too much—for them, these were things organised by someone else for someone else. They said that LGBT activists in Montenegro were very brave, but they did not feel connected to the activism, or that Pride had a lot to do with them and their everyday lives.

A similar sentiment was shared by Matej, a stylish gay man in his mid-thirties. Matej, a precarious salesman in a clothing shop, was even annoyed by the Pride Processions as he saw no need for them. He wondered: if he had managed to organise his intimate life so far by using dark

alleys and the Internet, why could others not do the same? He has said more than once: “Why on earth would anyone want to walk the streets of the town clearly marked as a gay person? Why would anyone want to be seen and recognised as such?”

Just like many other gay men, Matej, Petar, and Goran have found a way to accommodate homophobia in their everyday lives: in order to continue being a son, a brother, a worker, *and* to meet some of their needs for love and sex, these men have found a way to work around pervasive homophobia as well as to integrate some of it into their everyday routines. Matej’s words reflect internalised homophobia, or a combination of negative affect, thoughts, and behaviours that a gay person has towards homosexual practices of other people and oneself, including same-sex desire, affectionate feelings, and relationships (see Frost & Meyer, 2009).

Broadly speaking, many LGBT people in Montenegro who are not activists expressed a similar sense of separation from LGBT activism and the Pride Processions of the last few years. They frequently reacted to LGBT activism and the Pride event with reluctant acceptance at best or outright criticism at worst. One way—with which we do not agree—to understand this sense of separation of LGBT people from LGBT activism would be to assume that these people do not know what is good for them. We could assume that they are frightened and auto-homophobic to the point that it makes them incapable of understanding what would make their own lives better and easier. They are so afraid of being recognised as gay that they cannot grasp what might help them in the long run. Homophobia was indeed pervasive: public opinion surveys from 2010 (Uljarević et al., 2011) to 2012 (Laković-Drašković et al. 2015) show that high levels of homophobia (in the broadest sense of the word) can be traced across Montenegro. More specifically, 68.5 % of the population in 2010 and 59.9 % in 2012 believed that homosexuality is a disease. Similarly, 61.3 % in 2010 believed that homosexuals do not have the right to freely express their sexuality in public, while 45 % of people interviewed had this opinion in 2012. Surveys have measured a certain decrease in public support of violence towards LGBT people, but 11 % of the general population justified violent behaviour directed towards LGBTIQ people in 2012.

However, we do not think that such an interpretation of a sense of separation from activism is appropriate, because it pathologises a large

portion of LGBT people in Montenegro. The problem is not so much that some people, like Matej, Petar, Goran, or many other women, men, and trans people lacked personal, civic bravery to show up at the Pride Processions, or that they were unable to see what was good and what was bad for them. We want to suggest, instead, that this sense of separation from human rights discourses and practices is closely associated with the history of “civil society” as a concept and as a practice in Montenegro and other former Yugoslav states (Stubbs, 1996).

Namely, a particular normative idea of what civil society is and how it should operate was introduced in Montenegro in the early 1990s, during and after the fall of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia, as something that had yet to be built, rather than something that should be developed from existing forms of sociality (Stubbs, 2012). Both local and foreign actors often ignored social practices which had a transformative potential usually implied by the notion of “civil society” (Stubbs, 2007). In other words, there were local forms of solidarity and associational and communal life that the international community and foreign donors did not necessarily always recognise as a basis for organising “civil society” (Bilić, 2012; Bilić & Janković, 2012; Jansen, 2005). Instead, former Yugoslavia was seen as a more or less blank space in which “civil society”, “feminism”, and many other presumably progressive concepts had to be introduced externally (Brković, 2010; Helms, 2013; Potkonjak et al., 2008).

As a result of this local history of the concept, many Montenegrin citizens rarely perceive “civil society” as a framework in which their ideas, needs, and grievances can be framed (cf. Hann & Dunn, 1996). They see “civil society” more as a framework which responds to the will, ideas, and needs of international funders, the EU, and the Montenegrin government. As some kind of a “utopian imaginary”, the concept of “civil society” has had a significant impact on political life in Eastern Europe. However, it does not account for “gaps, slippages, and difference” (Gal & Kligman, 2000, p. 93) between the daily practices of politics and the normative idea of where politics is and how it should be practised.

Therefore, we want to suggest that contemporary LGBT activism in Montenegro brings not only a new *topic*—the visibility and protection of people who practise non-heteronormative forms of sexuality. LGBT

activism as a type of human rights activism also introduces new *procedures* and *techniques* for making things political. The language and practices of human rights NGOs include “target groups”, “project implementation”, “strategies and action plans”, “project evaluation”, “fundraising”, and so forth. These are relatively new concepts, which are not quite comprehensible to many people living in Montenegro. Besides pervasive heteronormativity and homophobia, this is one of the many reasons why the legitimacy of LGBT issues is contested—perceived as external and imposed, rather than as stemming from oppressive relations over certain members of a political community.

LGBT Activism and “Europeanisation”

The start of the EU accession process and EU member state building in Montenegro is the point from which we can track the emergence of organised LGBT activism. One of us (Danijel) often says that the roots of LGBT activism in Montenegro were turned “upside-down” when compared with other former Yugoslav or Eastern European states. For instance, since the early 1990s in Croatia or Serbia there were LGBT groups and initiatives often closely linked with women’s organisations (Juričić 2012; Mladenović, 2005; Savić, 2011; Vasić, 2012). Visible LGBT activists worked alone or in small groups towards improving their human rights. When homosexuality was decriminalised and a critical mass of activists was already present, the LGBT organisations were registered and larger and more serious projects initiated.¹

In Montenegro, things took a somewhat different course. First, the mainstream Montenegrin NGOs created a coalition, through which they initiated a public discussion about LGBT human rights and started cooperating with state institutions. The mainstream NGOs organised various forms of education and capacity building and created the conditions for LGBT people to come out and register their own organisations. At least

¹ The grassroots origins of LGBT activism are also clearly visible in Slovenia, where, as Kajinić (this volume) emphasises, the first European festival of lesbian and gay film was organised in the mid-1980s, during the SFRY. See also Kuhar (2012).

partly, this “upside-down” dynamic was the result of a very high degree of homophobia and transphobia, and very strong patriarchal traditions. The end result is that Montenegro is currently making the fastest progress in the domain of LGBT human rights in the region from the perspective of various donors. Despite the fact that public officials and the state institutions often did not work as well as they should have (and despite the impression which we cannot escape—that the state institutions and officials, conditioned by the EU accession process, have often worked on LGBT issues more for the EU than for their citizens), LGBT activism has made many actors in Montenegro aware that LGBT people exist.

LGBT activism has been a constitutive part of the local and international efforts to “Europeanise” Montenegro. Vice versa, organised attempts to improve the life of non-heterosexual Montenegrin citizens have been inseparable from the EU integration process and member state building. The queering and the “Europeanisation” of Montenegro were thus not just parallel but also deeply intertwined processes, which have influenced and shaped the dynamic of one another. Let us take a closer look at how the dynamic between queering and the “Europeanisation” of Montenegro has been played out.

From the Decriminalisation of Homosexuality to Montenegrin Independence, 1970–2006

Interventions in the federal legislature of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia led to the decriminalisation of male homosexual relations between 1976 and 1977 in the Yugoslav federative republics of Slovenia, Croatia, Montenegro, as well as in the autonomous province of Vojvodina.² The decriminalisation of homosexuality in 1977 suggests that the Yugoslav state had made the first important step in the struggle for the rights of the LGBT people—although there was likely no underlying intention to

²The interventions included legislative reforms, decentralisation of a portion of governmental responsibilities from the federative Yugoslav level to the governments of the Yugoslav republics and provinces, and the first discussions about decriminalisation of the so-called *protivprirodni blud* (unnatural fornication). Similarly to other Yugoslav republics, earlier Montenegrin legislature did not refer to “female sexual relations”.

work on equality for LGBT people (see Dota, 2015; Tomović, 2014). In the course of the following 26 years, public and political discussions did not touch upon LGBT issues and Montenegro. An unexpected break of this silence occurred on 1 May 2003: the Montenegrin government has ratified the Law on Media, whose Article 23 (Broadcasting Agency, 2002, online) states the following:

It is forbidden to publicise information and opinions that instigate discrimination, hatred or violence against persons or group of persons based on their belonging or not belonging to a certain race, religion, nation, ethnic group, sex or *sexual orientation* (emphasis added).

The lack of organised activist work on this issue in 2003 suggests that Article 23 was probably copied, more or less by accident, from a similar legislature of an EU or an ex-YU country (such as Slovenia or Croatia), without the explicit intention of providing protection from discrimination against LGBT people in Montenegro.

Later that same year, an NGO called Free Rainbow (*Slobodna duga*) was registered as the first organisation in Montenegro working on the promotion and protection of rights of people practising non-straight sexualities.³ Free Rainbow received financial support from the Swedish Helsinki Committee and from the programme of the Youth Cultural Centre Juventas (Omladinski kulturni centar Juventas, now Juventas) for building capacities for minority rights protection. In July 2005, this organisation initiated a project NGO Solidarity regarding the Promotion of Human Rights, which had a potential to create a good basis for future activities on the improvement of human rights of LGBT people in this

³ In November 2004, Free Rainbow hosted Atila Kovač, an editor of the first gay magazine in Serbia and Montenegro, *Dečko* (The Boy). When Kovač appeared in a TV show on the Montenegrin national television, fans of the sports club “Budućnost”, in Podgorica, gathered in front of the TV broadcasting company and threw stones at the building right after the TV show ended. In early December 2004, NGO Human Rights Action from Podgorica requested information from the public prosecutor about the criminal prosecution of persons who organised the attack. However, the prosecutor did not provide any response until the end of that year. Furthermore, although the police arrested three persons related to this attack, Kovač received no information from the relevant Montenegrin authorities about any legal case being led against his attackers. Additionally, newspaper titles from that period regularly represented homosexuality as inseparable from paedophilia and sexual abuse: for example, D. St. (2005) and Tanjug (2004).

country. The organisation itself had a good image among LGBT people and started gathering a number of supporters/sympathisers interested in activism. However, the enthusiasm did not last more than a few months: the organisation was closed in September 2005. According to a story frequently retold amongst human right activists in Montenegro, the director of the organisation left the country after stealing the money which the donors had paid to her organisation for project implementation (Lazarević, 2009).

EU Integration

The 2005 Progress Report of the European Commission for Serbia and Montenegro (European Commission, 2005) explicitly mentions sexual orientation and states that:

According to human rights organisations, discrimination based on sexual orientation is a problem. In general terms, it appears that the level of protection against discrimination in Serbia and Montenegro is still far from the EU standards requiring the implementation of the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin and the establishment of a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation, irrespective of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation.

Although this report offered an opportunity to initiate a discussion of LGBT issues with the state institutions, the commitments of public officials were directed elsewhere: the referendum about Montenegrin independence was fast approaching. After Montenegro regained its independence in May 2006, both the process of EU integration and discussions concerning LGBT issues intensified.⁴

⁴ Despite many problems, the issues set in motion could hardly be stopped, and certain changes had happened in 2006, 2007, and 2008. For instance, in 2006 Juventas continued Free Rainbow's activities on "capacity building", particularly through a programme on sexual health and rights of men who have sex with men. The programme is still ongoing and provides strong support to LGBT initiatives in Montenegro, and it has served as a core for creating the organisation Queer Montenegro and Montenegro Pride.

2007–2010: Human Rights NGOs and NGO Coalition

After the independence of Montenegro, the EU integration process and organised work on LGBT issues had a very similar dynamic. For instance, Montenegro signed the Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the European Communities and their Member States on 15 October 2007, while several NGOs started working on LGBT issues in 2008 (including *Akcija za ljudska prava*, *Inicijativa mladih za ljudska prava*, *Centar za građansko obrazovanje*, *Centar za žensko i mirovno obrazovanje Anima*, and *Juventas*). Furthermore, Montenegro submitted an official request to join the EU on 15 December 2008,⁵ while in 2009, human rights NGOs initiated a public discussion about the human rights of LGBT people and started cooperating more closely with the international and EU institutions on the protection of the human rights of LGBT people.

In March 2009, NGO *Juventas* opened the first online portal for LGBT people in Montenegro.⁶ The portal included a forum which served as a place to meet new people online, learn new information, and exchange opinions. The forum discussions were lively and had led the forum participants to collectively meet in person after a few months. In the course of the following year, some of the forum participants created an informal activist group called *Queer Brigade* (November 2010). Later on they registered the NGO *Queer Montenegro*.⁷

In 2009, a historically important event occurred: a trans man came out in a Montenegrin newspaper and, under his full name and his picture, spoke about violence and the problems he encountered in everyday

⁵The 2008 European Commission Progress Report on Montenegro states that: “In the area of anti-discrimination policies, adoption of the draft law on the prohibition of discrimination is pending. LGBT people are marginalised and discriminated against in Montenegrin society due to homophobic attitudes and lack of legal and practical protection by the authorities. In addition to increasing legislative efforts, comprehensive anti-discrimination measures covering sexual orientation and gender identity are needed” (European Commission, 2008, online).

⁶Available at www.montenegro-gay.me.

⁷The first public promotion of human rights of LGBT people in Montenegro was organised on 17 May 2009, the International Day Against Homophobia. In Podgorica’s city centre, *Juventas*’ activists distributed questionnaires on attitudes towards homosexuality, as well as promotional material from the first campaign directed to decreasing homophobia in Montenegro, “So different, yet equal”. The event passed without incidents.

life, which led him to decide to leave the country (Pavićević, 2009).⁸ Although this interview attracted a lot of interest among Montenegrin citizens and provoked a lot of transphobic and homophobic commentary, another event had initiated discussion between the Government and the EU institutions about the human rights of the LGBT people. Namely, in a popular TV show the former Minister of Human and Minority rights, Ferhat Dinoša (Television Vijesti, 2009), stated:

I am not sure how much of *that* is present in Montenegro, but I have to say, this is not good news for this milieu. To be honest, I myself am not very happy if *that* [homosexuality] exists in Montenegro. However, as a person who is doing the job that I am doing, and as a person beyond this job, I am ready to admit that this happens, this exists, and such cases need a lot of space to breathe—we do not have to create this space, but we should not suffocate it.

Montenegrin NGOs publicly requested Dinoša's resignation after the TV show and asked the Government to assert that the Minister's words did not reflect its official position.⁹ This event led the EU institutions to start reacting to LGBT issues in the country and emphasising what public officials may or may not say.¹⁰ The Minister attracted further attention from EU representatives and the international community after he failed to show up as an announced panellist at a 2009 conference "Justice in the Balkans: Equality for Sexual Minorities", which was financially co-sponsored by his Ministry, organised by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), supported by several European and US universities, and organised by Juventas.

⁸For a longer account of this case, see also Zeković (n.d.).

⁹Fourteen NGOs made a request to Prime Minister Milo Đukanović to suggest the Parliament to release Dinoša from his governmental duties, but Đukanović did not respond to this public request. Instead, Đukanović has stated for the media that Dinoša had expressed his private attitude, rather than the opinion of the Montenegrin Government.

¹⁰The director of the neuropsychiatric clinic, Željko Golubović, also made homophobic statements publicly. Namely, in the TV show "Replika", at the Montenegrin national television, Golubović stated that "According to the international classification of diseases (ICD 10), widely accepted throughout the world, homosexuality is as a diagnostic category—whether we consider it to be a disease, or not". The Medical Chamber of Montenegro did not react or sanction Golubović in any way. Juventas had been trying to schedule a meeting with the Medical Chamber of Montenegro for a year, without success.

Dinoša had an opportunity to meet a gay person on 18 November 2009 (one of the authors of this text who was an activist in the NGO *Juventas* at that time). On that day, a round table on human rights in Montenegro was organised, with the support of the European Commission. Dinoša repeatedly made homophobic statements.¹¹ Danijel asked Dinoša to explain why he was not happy about the existence of the LGBT people in Montenegro, what could possibly make him unhappy about this, and to apologise for his statements. Dinoša never apologised or responded directly to the questions. However, this event—the first coming out of a gay man in front of a Montenegrin public official—had effects. Only a day later, the newly elected Montenegrin Ombudsman gave a public statement promising to look into Dinoša's statements about LGBT issues and the Ombudsman institution became one of the leading partners of the NGOs concerning the human rights of LGBT people.¹²

In May 2010, the NGO *Juventas* initiated a coalition *Together for LGBT Rights*, supported by the EU Delegation in Montenegro.¹³ The Coalition consisted of twenty NGOs, ten state institutions, and four media companies. *Juventas* also initiated a number of trainings and seminars for LGBT people to strengthen their capacities for activism, and for medical workers, the police, the judiciary, and journalists.¹⁴ On 27 July 2010, with an overwhelming majority, the Montenegrin Parliament adopted the *Law on the Prohibition of Discrimination* which explicitly forbids discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender.

¹¹ During the round table, whose participants included the highest officials from the EU Delegation to Montenegro, Dinoša said that “Adam is not Adam without Eve. If someone understands life differently, that is his [sic!] right”.

¹² Due to a great pressure from the international actors, largely from the EU institutions, representatives of the diplomatic core, and NGOs, Dinoša's function in the Ministry for Human Rights ended. Dinoša became Ambassador of Montenegro in Albania, although his homophobic statements were not listed as the reasons for the reassignment.

¹³ In January 2010, *Juventas* conducted an interview-based study with LGBT people about, among other things, their problems and the ways of resolving those problems. The results of the study were used as a basis for formulating Action Plan Against Homophobia, which later became an officially adopted policy of the government for fighting homophobia and transphobia, “Strategy for Improving Life Quality among LGBT persons”.

¹⁴ In June 2010, within the scope of the same project supported by the EU Delegation in Montenegro, *Juventas* organised a study visit to the LGBT human rights organisations in Serbia. Participants of the visit included representatives of the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights, the Institution of the Protector of human rights and freedoms, the Centre for Social Work Podgorica, and the Employment Institute of Montenegro.

The exact legal formulation was reached during a public discussion through the significant influence of members of LGBT human rights NGOs and of EU institutions who requested the harmonisation of the Montenegrin with the EU anti-discriminatory legislature.¹⁵ Later that same year, on 17 December 2010, Montenegro became an official candidate country for EU membership.

2011–2015: LGBT Organisations and Pride Processions

On 24 January 2011, a new organisation called LGBT Forum Progress was registered in Montenegro. Soon after that, Zdravko Cimbalević, its director, became the first gay man to publicly come out. The LGBT Forum Progress announced preparations for the first Pride Parade in Podgorica, only to cancel it after a few months, due to a lack of political will from the Montenegrin government (Klasić, 2011). In February, the NGO Juventas opened a drop-in centre for LGBT people in Podgorica, as a communal centre offering education, healthcare services, cultural events, and opportunities for socialisation. It also initiated phone and online counselling, an online service for reporting homophobic violence, and continued its work on training the police, medical workers, and the judiciary about LGBT issues.

Led by Juventas, the Coalition “Together for LGBT Rights” prepared a Draft of the Action Plan for Fighting Homophobia and directed it to the Government. The Government avoided dealing with the document. Instead of responding to the Draft, the Government together with Dr. Jovan Kojičić, as the advisor to the Prime Minister, organised a conference Towards Europe, Towards Equality, to which none of the organisations

¹⁵On 11 October 2010, Biljana Babović, a psychology teacher in Podgorica’s grammar school, stated in a TV show “Glamour Noir” (Atlas Television, 2010) that homosexuality is a disease and a disorder, that she has successfully cured four persons of homosexuality, that World Health Organisation is actively working on bringing back homosexuality to its list of diseases, and that homosexuals are the prime carriers of the HIV infection. The Coalition “Together for LGBT rights” and the members of the National coordinating body against HIV and AIDS reacted forcefully, while a gay man activist from Juventas submitted to the Montenegrin Ombudsman the first charge against discrimination on the basis of sexuality in Montenegro. Babović had to pay a monetary fine and Agency for Electronic Media of Montenegro published an analysis of the TV show, alongside a set of recommendations to all media regarding reporting on problems and human rights issues of LGBT people.

working on LGBT rights in Montenegro were invited as participants, but only as audience members. This led twenty-six domestic and twenty-seven foreign organisations to refuse to participate in the conference and to a temporary interruption of cooperation between Montenegrin NGOs and the Government.¹⁶ After several months of lobbying and pressure from the NGOs and the international community, a Draft of the Action Plan was adopted. In November 2012, a group of Juventas activists who were also members of the Queer Brigade registered the Montenegrin LGBT association Queer Montenegro and soon one gay identified person and one lesbian identified person publicly came out. This was also the year when the accession negotiations with the EU were initiated.

The end of 2012 and 2013 was a very dynamic period with a number of unexpected events. The LGBT Forum Progress announced the first Montenegrin Pride Parade to be organised in 2013. The Report of the European Commission positively evaluated progress regarding LGBT issues in Montenegro. The Government adopted a document called the *Strategy for Improving the Quality of Life of LGBT persons*, with an Action Plan of implementation for 2014. After the Strategy was adopted, Zdravko Cimbalević announced that his organisation, the LGBT Forum Progress, would not organise the Parade and would instead focus on the implementation of the Strategy. On 2 July 2013, Queer Montenegro announced the organisation of a Pride Procession of LGBT people, Montenegro Pride for 20 October 2013. A few days later, the LGBT Forum Progress announced the organisation of a Pride Parade in the Montenegrin coastal town of Budva on 24 July 2013, called The Sea Pride. The Sea Pride was held in Budva on the said date, under heavy police protection and with violence.

On 20 October 2013, Queer Montenegro organised Montenegro Pride with a lot of support and participants from domestic, regional, and international organisations, diplomacy, and the EU Delegation in Montenegro. There were around 200 participants in the procession, protected by 1900 police officers, while groups of hooligans clashed with

¹⁶Most domestic NGOs interpreted this as an attempt of to create a false impression that Montenegrin Government cooperated with human rights organisations. The cooperation was re-established after government representatives accepted several terms posed by the human rights organisations (Government of Montenegro, 2011).

the police in several locations and made about 20,000 euros worth of damage. Tens of hooligans were arrested, although the prosecution did not charge a single person.

The organisation of the Pride Processions in 2013 and 2014 would not have been possible without EU pressure on public institutions and officials in Montenegro. The fact that, during its accession negotiations with the EU in 2013, Montenegro opened Chapter 23 (judiciary and fundamental rights) and Chapter 24 (justice, freedom, and security) was important for organising Pride. Montenegrin state officials reasoned that they had to do everything possible to ensure LGBT people had the right to freely gather in public, since failing to respect this human right would have led to a poorer evaluation of the success of Montenegro's EU integrations. Soon after the Pride event, government representatives informed Queer Montenegro activists that they did not support the idea of organising a Montenegro Pride the following year. This indicates that the EU integration process was the primary motive of state institutions in responding affirmatively to the requests of the human rights organisations.

The campaign for the 2014 Pride was initially met with sharp criticism from state institutions, especially expressed in the public announcements of the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights. With the support of EU institutions, after several months of struggle, the organisers of Montenegro Pride managed to gather support from state institutions.¹⁷ The result of this partnership between domestic and foreign organisations was a peaceful second Montenegro Pride with no incidents, during which Pride participants were guarded by 1800 police officers.

Inscribing the “Local” and the “Traditional” into LGBT Activism

The activists were not ignorant of a sense of separation of LGBT people from the LGBT activism which we have briefly described above. Since they knew that people in Montenegro often associate LGBT activism with

¹⁷Together with the EU and other international representatives, Queer Montenegro has initiated a discussion about the public prosecution of hate crimes, resulting in two criminal charges related to the second Montenegro Pride in 2014.

progress, modernity, and the West, they tried to inscribe “local” and “traditional” symbols into their public representations. For instance, Queer Montenegro activists decided that the event in Montenegro should be called *Povorka ponosa* (Pride Procession) rather than *Parada ponosa* (Pride Parade). The activists chose the term *povorka* because they thought it would be less antagonising in the Montenegrin context than the term *parade*. “To parade” (*paradirati*) refers not only to a public procession but also to “standing out”, “sticking a finger in the eye”, “pompously bragging”, usually about having a lot of money. Taking into account that human rights activism and NGO institutional forms are often seen in Montenegro (and in the wider post-Yugoslav space) as a way of improving one’s own livelihood (Greenberg, 2014; Stubbs, 2007), the activists wanted to move away from this link between “parading” and wealth and luxury, which posited homosexuality as a Western decadence. *Povorka*, on the other hand, resonates more with religious meanings and even with meanings of death and mortality. It is commonly used to refer to a funeral procession (*pogrebna povorka*), although it is also sometimes used to refer to a wedding procession (*svadbena povorka*). Queer Montenegro activists thought the Montenegrin Pride should be a serious walk rather than a parade of colours, body, and sex, which they saw as a currently dominant concept behind Pride Parades in Western Europe. Activists claimed they loved the “Western Prides”, which some of them attended with a certain regularity. However, they reasoned that Montenegro needed something else—a solemn procession, rather than a flamboyant Pride (see also Johnson, 2012).

Furthermore, the activists tried to integrate symbols of local heritage and traditional patriarchal masculinity and femininity into the visual politics of Pride. The logo of the first 2013 Pride Procession in Podgorica represented a moustache (Image 6.1), which is seen as a symbol of traditional masculinity, a sign of a “proper man”, in Montenegro as well as in other former Yugoslav states (see Škokić, 2011). Activists decided to inscribe this symbol of traditional masculinity into the visual politics of Pride in order to disturb local ideas that a “true man” cannot be gay. Continuing with this concept, the slogan of the 2014 Pride Procession was “Traditionally Proud”, while the logo represented a traditional Montenegrin woman with a scarf around her head in rainbow colours and with a moustache (Image 6.2). Queer Montenegro activists



Image. 6.1 2013 Montenegro Pride Logo

unofficially amongst themselves call the second logo *Ljeposava*: here, an old Montenegrin name for a woman which accentuates the link between the rural and the traditional. *Ljeposava* appropriated symbols of traditional, old-style, supposedly rural femininity (such as a head scarf, red cheeks, facial hair), thus challenging the opposition between Europe, progress, and homosexuality, on the one hand, and the Balkans, rural tradition, and heterosexuality, on the other.

The first logo provoked a lot of attention in the media. The newspapers even reported that an elderly man living in the north of the country shaved off his moustache for the first time in 57 years, after Queer Montenegro appropriated this symbol of masculinity for their Pride logo.¹⁸ *Ljeposava* did not seem to be as upsetting. We could speculate that the second logo was less visibly antagonising because it represented a woman. Perhaps women's desire and sexuality are perceived as less of a threat because they are not taken seriously in the first place: many lesbians and bisexual women in Montenegro claim their sexual desires are often either disregarded as immature and juvenile or appropriated into a patriarchal fantasy where they serve to titillate a male observer. In order to be understood as a threat, women's non-heteronormative

¹⁸ See Radio and Television of Montenegro (2013).



Image. 6.2 2014 Montenegro Pride Logo

desires would first have to be perceived as autonomous. On the other hand, perhaps the second logo provoked less attention simply because it was a *second* logo. In any case, appropriation of “tradition” and “rurality” into Montenegro Pride was not an accident. Danijel explained the choice of logo in a media interview (Savić, 2014, online):

The very use of a moustache last year was a queer intervention in a visual sense and in a sense of the message which Queer Montenegro and Montenegro Pride send to the general population. The moustaches and this year’s slogan (...) aim to question who has the right to wear a moustache, to directly speak to tradition, to identity based and nationalised norms. (...) Our questioning of tradition this year has gone a step further. (...) Instead of a picture of a traditional Montenegrin woman with a black scarf whose place is in the kitchen, in the bed, and often in maternity wards, and who is invisible and quiet, this year her face was the logo of the Pride, with a rainbow scarf and moustache. Queer plays with many social

issues and questions them in different ways—and this is precisely what Montenegro Pride engaged in this and last year. Queer can and should question the past, tradition and traditional roles of a man and a woman, and this is what the identity of the Prides this and last year managed to do.

Such choices—the term *povorka* rather than *parada*, the logos, and the slogans—indicate that the activists were fully aware of the local context in which they operated. They tried to make a symbolic link with Montenegrin heritage and to present LGBT Pride as something that legitimately belongs to Montenegro, with all of its complex funeral traditions, processions, scarves, and moustaches. They did not want the Montenegrin publics to see Pride Processions as something imposed from outside, but as something grounded in local practices and relations.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have presented the chronology and dynamic of LGBT activism in Montenegro, suggesting that it has been firmly intertwined with the “Europeanisation” of the country or, more precisely, with the process of negotiating EU accession. In complex intersections between sexuality and geopolitics, LGBT rights are often used as an indicator of the “Europeanness” of a particular country. Pride Parades are taken to be a particularly potent sign of “civilisational progress” and “European values” (Davydova, 2012; Mikuš, 2011). However, understanding homophobia in post-socialist contexts as an “anti-European” reaction effectually erases LGBT people from view, by transforming them into “symbolic representatives of other tensions, national or transnational” (Renkin, 2009, p. 33). It also obscures “the ‘West’s’ homophobia, directing attention from hegemonic intolerance there” (Renkin, 2009, p. 25).

Approaching LGBT people in Montenegro “as agents, as active negotiators” (Renkin, 2009, p. 33), allows seeing how the activists navigated the interests of international actors and the Montenegrin government, to target widespread homophobia and secure a living as visible non-straight persons in Montenegro. During these negotiations, the activists attempted

to forge a link between homosexuality and “tradition”, thus challenging the conventional intersections between sexuality and geopolitics. By claiming to be “Traditionally Proud” and appropriating symbols of conventional patriarchal masculinity and femininity into Pride Processions, the activists attempted to relate LGBT activism to the local socio-cultural context. However, visual and narrative representations of Pride in the media alone could not cut the symbolic link between “Europe” and “homosexuality”, because the dynamic of the LGBT activism itself largely depends on the EU accession process. The discursive frameworks of the EU induce the willingness of state officials to nominally support LGBT activism and to consider sexuality as a political topic. Thus, LGBT activists in Montenegro used the EU accession process strategically to push forward their agenda, and in doing so the link between “Europe” and “homosexuality” was reproduced.

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